

School Safety Infrastructure Council

Good Evening. I would like to thank the Council for this opportunity to speak this evening. I would like to start off by telling you my time is short and I am going to touch on some areas of concern and explain why I choose to speak tonight. I would invite the members to allow me to speak on the issues and after I speak to ask questions for more detail on the areas I speak about. Let me start by telling you something about myself. My name is Vincent Riccio, my background includes military investigator, Police and security experience spanning just over 35 years in the law enforcement field and presently the owner of Security Academy of Connecticut which specializes in active shooter prevention training and security consulting for schools, businesses and government entities. I am also writing a book about the tragedy at Sandy Hook and the response we as a people and leaders have taken in the search for solutions to this now encroaching plague of violence on our daily lives. I have to tell you if I completed the book today the mark I would give is an F for failure for the lack of School safety standards and the inaction on the mental health issues that are the direct causes to the active shooter phenomenon. My hope tonight is that this Council can do better.

I have been asked from time to time why I am interjecting myself into this matter? For more business, for notoriety, don't you work for money when your hired, I've been asked, what is your agenda? I will answer that with this. I recently wrote an Op-Ed in the New Haven Register where I said something "When we see something wrong, those that have the ability to take action have a responsibility to take action" Well I have that ability and here I am tonight. But I will also tell you something else, my ability to act over the years did not change things fast enough when I had been working one client at time, and that didn't help on December 14 of last year, and in that same Op Ed I said something else, It did change things for a friend,

"I lost a friend this week because we choose to live in denial. Richard Michael "Mike" Ridgell, 52, was one of a dozen victims killed in Monday's shooting at the Navy Yard. Mike was the Security Officer killed Monday morning trying to protect the innocent; he was a retired Maryland State Trooper with 3 daughters. Why can't we do more, I can, can you?"

I am here because I want to help this Council succeed in recommendations for sound and practical school building design that enhances school safety and security when building new schools and up grading other schools. One school comes to mind when I think of an example of

bad school safety design is a new High School recently build. That school was designed with more glass then most, I know it was designed with lighting and learning environment aesthetics in mind, but that was the only concern in mind. When I had an opportunity earlier this year to see the plans before the school was completed I was horrified. Not only after knowing that the Sandy Hook shooter had shot out the glass at the front door and the front entrance of this new school was covered in glass but there was ever more dire problem which I don't think anyone saw coming. When I talked to the contractor who contacted me that day back in February of this year and I saw the plans I made a prediction. The plan called for and was later build for a cafeteria on a lower level with a balcony above to cafeteria 1 level above. Sound familiar, it should, the Navy Yard Shooter just this past week for the first time in the history of and active shooter uses a balcony above a cafeteria to target his victims. Cafeterias have been targets before in school shootings in fact the number 1 target and this school was designed in this manner, what were they thinking it was only an matter of time before an active shooter would target their victims in this manner and that was just last week, completing my prediction. But it gets worse, the balcony is only 50 feet from the front entrance to the school, making any warning almost impossible if the shooter ether piggy backs or shoots out the glass, the shooter is just feet away from hundreds of victims having lunch.

When I contacted the school superintendent to talk about the school, whether or not they even knew there was a vulnerability and what action they may have taken to mitigate the vulnerability their only concern was that I not speak about the school.

But moving on I did read the minutes from the last meeting of the Council and saw that from the testimony some questions were asked but not answered that day. I would like to try to answer them.

Commissioner Pryor asked if they're aware of any school districts now that have established their own guidelines. Mr. Carmelich replied that he wasn't aware of any. Mr. Cirasuolo mentioned that a lot of architects they've spoken to are very up to date on school safety.

Schools though out the state have a patchwork of guidelines, practices and policies which make any consolidated set if good practices and procedures hard to streamline when school consultants work with schools, the all have different objectives. That is why this Council, to

begin to set these good practices and procedures and standards for the entire state. For instance New Haven schools all have different responses to an active shooter event, so when the police arrive their knowledge is limited to what may already be happening inside the school in response to the active shooter.

Commissioner Pryor asked if there are any school security features that are too pricey and have made it difficult for school officials to get through the design process. Mr. Carmelich replied that there has been a lot of discussion concerning locks. Most folks don't understand their cost. They can be very expensive. Bullet proof or resistant glass is also very costly. Mr. Cirsuolo thought that if the state could provide a list of "best" practices with regard to school security infrastructure design, it would be incredibly helpful.

Yes locks are pricey, one reason is that locks need to comply with fire codes, but locks are the first line of defense for a class room and entrances to schools. In this state most schools that are older and most of the state in older schools, locks don't lock from the inside and this needs to change. Also I need to point something out here. Fire code. Right now fire codes compel us to work within its code, but I say here and now that fires do kill people in schools but how long has it been since? Yes we need to remain vigilante but we have lost 26 people to an active shooter and it continues to happen. So I say that fire codes should not trump Emergency codes and standards which may be developed in the future. They need to work together and complement each other, not prevent for instance the locking of doors during an active shooter event. Let's say a fire and an active shooter event happened at the same time would we only prevent the fire victims only to be killed by a shooter?

Chairman DeFronzo stated that the state spends about \$500-600 million a year on school construction. The standards the SSIC develops will apply to new construction and as a result, may prompt others to retrofit. The SSIC will make sure best practices are part of that plan. Staff will review standards and determine if they're acceptable. The chairman also mentioned that as we promulgate these rules and regulations, there needs to be a willingness to comply. Mr. Cirsuolo replied (concerning the human element) that when there are procedures in place, there should be a requirement that those procedures be practiced on a regular basis. He believes this will help change the culture over time.

Practice and complying with code. Right now there isn't a State Mandatory requirement for lock down drills this needs to change! It needs to become Mandatory that and codes and standards you come up with. Without it being Mandatory schools districts will fail to address the problem.

SRO's

Expensive, several problems with SRO's, Increase in arrests, in most cases involving zero tolerance for minor violations, so increases need for training, SRO's not always in place when incident takes place ie; Columbine, MONEY, SRO's are expensive, ie; salary, extra training. SRO's should not be considered unless program is sustainable. Armed Guards should only be considered again if sustainable and if training is the same as SRO's.